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SUBJECT: AYATOLLAHS BLAME U.S. FOR SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

¶1. This is a SET NAJAF cable.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY. In reaction to the terrorist attacks near Najaf's Imam Ali Shrine (April 6) and the Attack at Baghdad's Buratha mosque (April 7) two of the major Shi'a clerics affiliated with Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani issued sharply worded Fatwas blaming the United States and Anti-Iraqi forces for violence perpetrated against Shi'a. Ayatollah Mohamed Saeed Al Hakeem referred to the attack in Baghdad as evidence of attempted genocide. Ayatollah Bashir Al Najafi said, "The occupation brought all these troubles and was the cause, patron and attorney to the former regime." Both men called for the quick formation of a national government. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) The office of the Ayatollah Mohamed Al Hakeem issued a Fatwa on April 8. The statement condemned "fundamentalists and Baathists-for targeting followers of the holy Imams", equating acts of violence against Shi'a with genocide. He went on to demand that "the political authorities hurry in forming the government." The Fatwa further demanded solutions to track and terminate those who support terrorism. Finally, the Fatwa concluded by offering condolences to the "absent Imam" for the suffering that befalls his follower. Al Hakeem closed with a final wish "that the martyrs be raised up to heaven.

¶4. (SBU) In a terse Fatwa, Ayatollah Al Najafi described the situation in Iraq as "sad". He claimed that it was the occupation which brought the problems of "murder, plundering and displacement" to Iraq. The Fatwa asserted that every household in Iraq had suffered the effects of the former regime. "In each house," read the statement, "someone (was) killed or missing" because of Saddam Hussein. Iraq's "riches" according to Al Najafi had been plundered, especially oil, which was taken without proper payment to Iraqis. Politicians, noted Al Najafi, reached their positions on the backs of the people of Iraq, but all they care about now is, in fact, their positions.

¶5. (SBU) "They are not true Muslims", said Al Najafi, in reference to those who would come to Iraq to kill Iraqis. The statement damned the terrorists to hell and called for them to receive "the curse of God". The Hawza and the people have grown tired, Al Najafi asserted. It is only the agreement of politicians in forming the government that can stop the violence and the lack of agreement is the work of "ill intentioned" politicians, the Fatwa noted. Sincere politicians are rare, according to the Al Najafi. He closed with a warning for politicians who are not working diligently to form a government. "Patience has begun to run out," he said, "and I can not guess what tomorrow will bring them".

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT. The Fatwas of these two Ayatollahs are a strong rebuke of violence targeting Shia. While the Marja'aya have always spoken out against violence, the language is strong. The condemnation of the effort to form a government is

increasingly a central theme of the Marja'aya's public statements. While Ayatollah Al Sistani himself has yet to issue a Fatwa, it would likely mirror these two statements. Of note in Al Najafi and Al Hakeem's statements is the absence of an explicit call for peace. Should Sistani issue a statement as stern, it is possible that, without a call for peace, it will embolden Shi'a militias. END COMMENT.

FONTENEAU